KASHMIR – SITUATION UPDATE AND ANALYSIS

On 5 August 2019, the Government of India unilaterally revoked Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Article 370 guaranteed special autonomy to Jammu & Kashmir and gave it independence over matters excluding foreign affairs, defence and communication. This was followed by the enactment of the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganization Act that aims to bifurcate the state of Jammu & Kashmir into two separate union territories on 31 October 2019. Union territories, as opposed to states, are governed by the central government. All these amendments and changes were made amidst a complete communication clampdown, curfew on movement and mass detentions of political leaders in the region.

In September and October 2019, Amnesty International India spoke to the people of Jammu & Kashmir, including those detained in the context of the larger clampdown, as well as with the lawyers representing detained persons; medical professionals working in both government and private hospitals in the capital city of Srinagar; journalists and editors of local media; and representatives of the regional political parties. Amnesty International India reviewed photographs and documents presented as evidence of many specific events described during the interviews.

At the time of conducting these interviews, while both mobile phone and landline services were restored in the Jammu region, only landline services were restored in Kashmir.

Arbitrary mass detentions

> "Top leaders are under arrest…At the district level people have been arrested. At block level also our leaders are under arrest…This is madness"

Amnesty International India documented a clear pattern of authorities using administrative detention on politicians, activists and anyone likely to hold a dissenting opinion before and after 5 August. While the Central Home Ministry claims it has no information on the name and locations of detainees, media reports suggest that the number of detentions runs in thousands. The Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) police recently accepted that about 144 children, as young as nine, have been taken into custody.

Amnesty International India reached out to leaders across regional political parties in Kashmir. In some instances, no representatives were available to speak on the situation as entire party leadership was either detained, arrested or placed under house arrest. Few available leaders were released after signing bonds which promised they will not indulge in political activities, and therefore reserved their comments. Akbar Lone, a politician with the J&K National Conference, a sitting member of the Indian parliament and former speaker of the state legislative assembly in Jammu & Kashmir described the entire region to be under a "type of curfew" imposed by the current Indian government. He added, "Hundreds of our party members, from senior leaders to members on district and block levels, have either been formally arrested or placed under house arrest, in both Jammu and Kashmir regions, including Chenab valley… we are not able contact many of our colleagues across the state and have no clue what they are going through."

At the time of his detention under the controversial Jammu & Kashmir Public Safety Act (PSA) on 17 September 2019, 81-year old Farooq Abdullah held critical political positions. He was the chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, the oldest regional political party in the region and a sitting member of the Indian Parliament. Formerly, he was a Union Minister with the Indian government and thrice-elected Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir. In 1994, he represented India before the United Nations Human Rights Council and defended the country's position on Kashmir. Before being detained under PSA, Farooq Abdullah alleged that he was placed under house arrest, likely under the J&K Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

Other prominent leaders like Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, former chief ministers of Jammu and Kashmir and Shah Faesal, a bureaucrat-turned-politician and founder of J&K People's Movement (JKPM) also continue to be detained under PSA since 5 August.

Lone adds, "Two days earlier to their arrest they had met the prime minister and all was cordial. What happened overnight? The grounds of their arrest are unknown. Copies of their detention orders are also not shared. All the people from our party, and other mainstream parties too, have been detained without any specific reason. We do not know under what laws or sections of laws they have been arrested…Such form of arrests are unknown to a rights-respecting government."

Non-sharing of critical information such as grounds of arrest with the detainees' family members and lawyer constitutes a serious violation of the detainees' right to a fair trial. It prevents them from seeking an independent judicial review on the lawfulness of their detention. To make matters worse, the prolonged curfew in Kashmir severely affects their mobility to the courts.

The Indian government has repeatedly maintained that arrests, if any have been made to "keep the peace" in the region. According to media reports, only six local Kashmiri politicians have been released over the last month upon

signing a bond and on the condition that they will not "commit breach of peace" and indulge in any political activity including making political speeches. Other party leaders continue to be either under house arrest or jailed in Kashmir or other parts of India with little access to legal assistance. Many politicians have refused to acquiesce to such stringent conditions. Shah Faesal, who founded the JKPM, was reportedly asked to furnish a bond of Rs. 50,000 for "keeping the peace" in order to secure his release. Iltija, the daughter of Mehbooba Mufti, also reported that her mother was offered a similar bond which she refused to sign.

The release of political detainees on the condition of signing bonds prohibiting any political activities and speeches is as deeply problematic as their detentions in the first place. Political leaders in the Jammu region have also been ordered to not indulge in any kind of public address. Political speech cannot be prohibited under international law unless it constitutes a direct threat to public order, which has not been adequately demonstrated by the Indian government. On the contrary, the last words of many political detainees such as Omar Abdullah before their arrest were of request for the public to maintain calm and not to take the law into their own hands. The blanket nature of this condition does not fulfil the conditions of legality and proportionality. Instead, this vague and broad condition stifles public debate and impedes political discourse.

On 1 October, the Chief Electoral Officer of Jammu & Kashmir announced that the Block Development Council (BDC) elections will be held in the state on 24 October. Although almost all Jammu-based leaders have been released since the announcement, a similar action has not followed in Kashmir Valley. Almost all political parties, with the exception of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which also leads the central Indian government, has decided to boycott the BDC elections in Kashmir owing to the detention of all their party leaders and workers.

Shehla Rashid, who held the position of General Secretary of JKPM, resigned and withdrew from all political activities after the announcement of the BDC elections. While speaking with Amnesty International India, she said,

> "Politics, as we know it, is over in Kashmir. Politics is all about representation. This move has stripped people of any semblance of representation that they might have had, and paved way for anarchy."

However, arbitrary detentions are not limited to mainstream politicians. Amnesty International India was able to obtain various copies of the habeas corpus petitions filed against detentions under the controversial PSA in J&K High Court between 5 August 2019 and 16 October 2019. Out of the 576 petitions filed in 2019, 326 were filed in this period, indicating a pattern of mass detention since the unilateral abrogation of Article 370. Out of these 326 cases, at least four cases of illegal detention of minors were recorded.

Other persons interviewed by Amnesty International India included the family of 62-year old Manzoor Ahmad Kirman, a retired government employee of J&K Food and Supplies Department from Handwara, Kashmir who was associated with the JKPM. His detention order, under PSA, was issued by the District Magistrate of Kupwara on 30 August 2019. The grounds of his detention read as follows:

> "The subject joined political party of Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Movement headed by Shah Faesal, which has already declared its intentions to thwart the public order by raising slogans against the country and has shown unwanted dissent towards the Parliament's decision."

The order further goes on to state that Manzoor stands to create a "law and order problem" in the area. Before his detention under J&K PSA, Manzoor was detained under section 107 and 151 of the J&K CrPC on 17 August 2019. While the detention order states that he was released later, the family refutes this. His son-in-law, while speaking with Amnesty International India recalled, "He was never released. After his arrest he was detained in a guest house in Handwara and later shifted to Central Jail Srinagar from there". The family denies the allegation of the detaining

authority that Manzoor is associated with Jammat-e-Islami, which was recently declared as an unlawful organization under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. His son-in-law further added, "No FIR or police complaint has been registered against him. It is unfortunate how activists are being treated".

The family has filed a habeas corpus petition in the J&K high Court Srinagar for quashing the PSA detention order against Manzoor, though with little hope for his early release. His son-in-law said, "He is suffering from multiple health issues. His thyroid has to be operated and he also suffers from prostate cancer of grade second. He has carried medicines to jail but that will only last him for two months". He adds, "We have made a representation to the J&K Home Secretary, requesting to keep him lodged in any jail within Kashmir but not outside the region."

In Shopian, however, a different practice is followed. When Amnesty International India visited the district on 12 September, it found that people were not formally detained. Instead, youth from different villages were being picked by army and police and detained for four to eight days without formal charges and then released on signing a bond or an undertaking by the community heads stating that they will not indulge in stone pelting or protests. Detentions without any kind of documentation and recourse to justice completely overlook human rights guarantees and perpetuate fear in people.

Lawyers interviewed by Amnesty International India provided a similar account of the situation, saying that most of their clients do not have copies of PSA detention orders which hinders them from filing habeas corpus petitions in courts. Many others do not have access to lawyers, especially when they are lodged in jails outside Kashmir. Advocate Ghulam Nabi Khan, who practices at a lower court in Handwara, shared with Amnesty International India, "At least five people have approached me since 5 August for filing habeas corpus petitions in the J&K High Court. I have referred them to some lawyers in Srinagar since it is difficult for me follow their cases due to blockades and curfew on movement".

Arbitrary detention is prohibited in all circumstances. Detention is arbitrary when individuals are deprived of their liberty without a clear basis in law; where persons are detained solely for the peaceful exercise of certain human rights such as freedom of expression or association; or in cases of sufficiently serious violations of the right to fair trial. According to article 9(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, anyone arrested has a right to be immediately informed about the reasons for the arrest. The UN Human Rights Committee has stated that this must also apply to preventive and administrative detentions. However, Section 13 of the PSA allows the detaining authority to not communicate grounds of detention for up to 10 days of detention, and also to withhold any information that it considers "to be against the public interest to disclose", thus violating international human rights law. Detaining elected representatives and leaders while decisions are being made and implemented about their constituencies is against the representative and participatory thread of India.

Recently this week, several women silently protesting with placards in Srinagar were arrested which included Farooq Abdullah's sister Suraiya Abdullah and his daughter Safia Abdullah Khan. This only goes on to show the extent to which peacefully dissenting voices and protests are being curbed in Kashmir.

"None of us ever were against the cause of India. What have they been arrested for? Have they given slogans against India? Have they pleaded the cause for Pakistan? Have they pleaded any other cause? All of us were pleading for the cause of India alone," said Lone.

Use of excessive force

> "The victims and their families fear that they will be targeted by the army in case they talk to media or any outsider about their torture"

Recent stories in media have reported cases of torture and use of excessive force by various security forces stationed in Kashmir. The region continues to be the most militarized zone in the world since the last two months. On 5 September 2019, Amnesty International India travelled to Shopian to meet and interview the people who claimed to have been tortured by police, paramilitary and army since 5 August 2019.

Amnesty International India interviewed five young men who had been arbitrarily picked up by the security forces during raids in Hirpora, a village located around 12 kilometres from Shopian on Mughal Road, in separate incidents since 5 August. Most of the arrested people interviewed by Amnesty International India did not know what behaviour they were engaging in that was considered suspicious or criminal at the time of being detained. All of them reported use of excessive force by the security forces during their detention. Several of these cases amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, absolutely forbidden under international law.

Amnesty International India was told that after the story of their torture was telecasted by the international media channel BBC in early September, security forces went back to the homes of those tortured. Their homes were raided and their families were threatened of consequences in case they talk to anyone. None of the victims or their relatives wished to be identified. One of the villagers, on condition of anonymity, speaking of the reluctance and the pall of dread in the village, said, "The victims and their families fear that they will be targeted by the army in case they talk to media or any outsider about the torture meted out to them."

Similarly, a young man in his early twenties arrested from Diaroo village of district Shopian was reluctant to talk. His father, on a condition of anonymity, recalled,

> "A week ago the army had come to our village and took away the cell phone of my son. He was asked to come to their camp next day and to collect it from there. The army camp is around five kilometres from our village and is located at Haal village. Next morning he left home as usual in the morning but did not return for lunch. We became a bit concerned. Around 3 pm he returned home with bruises and injuries on his body. He told us that he was mercilessly beaten within the army camp. We took him to a nearby hospital for medical treatment. He is still on medication."

Other arrested persons interviewed by Amnesty International India had injuries and bruises on their bodies. Yawar Wazir[1] recollects that he was picked up during an army raid from his village.

He recalled:

> "I was taken to a neighbour's house and tortured there. I was beaten and given electric shocks."

Yawar refused to talk further out of fear of reprisals. He said, "The forces have sources everywhere who inform them about outsiders coming to villages and whom they meet. Eye is kept on every individual. So I don't want to invite any trouble". While speaking with a local lawyer from the village, Amnesty International India was informed that at least three men were tortured from Diaroo village but none of them were detained for more than a few hours.

[1] All names changed

Amnesty International India interviewed Abdul Malik from Haff Shirmaal, another village in Shopian district, who was tortured in the last two months. The army raided the home of Abdul Malik on 10 August and he was beaten. The army personnel took his identity card and cell phone and asked him to come to their camp, located at Chillipora village, next morning. Abdul went to the army camp along with two relatives and a lawyer. While he went inside the camp, others waited outside. After half an hour, Abdul was thrown outside in an unconscious condition with bruises all over his body. He had razor cuts on his legs and arms and also a fractured foot. The very next day, the army returned and ransacked their house.

Abdul is still on medication and cannot walk without the help of crutches. On lodging a complaint or moving to court on the incident, Amnesty International India was informed that it will only invite more fear, threats and raise insecurity of the family.

Amnesty International India documented a clear pattern of security personnel using excessive force and intimidation to minimize reporting of the same. Almost every detained person interviewed described being beaten and threatened. In several instances, as in the case described above, police officers appear to have ransacked homes and knowingly damaged public and private properties. For example, Rehmat, a woman from the Shanpora village, claims that on 20 August police had barged into their house and ransacked it, besides decamping with gold ornaments and cash they had at their home. She said, “Doors and windows of our house were broken. Even the only television in our house was not spared. They have ransacked and looted some other houses in the area and people are witness to it”. Some other villagers have narrated similar stories and blamed police and CRPF for damaging their properties. Mohammad Dar alleges that his boat, which is usually kept pegged in the stream that flows next to his house, was broken by the government forces during the raid in his village. Haseeb Ahmad, a resident of the same village, alleged that the government forces damaged transformers which feed electricity to the village. He said, “They fired bullets at the transformers, which affected electricity supply in the village. Now the locals have repaired them on their own”. The electricity feeding transformers in the area are now being protected by the villagers by erecting thick tin shields and sand bags around them.

Where public protests have occurred, the police have responded with use of force that has been at times excessive and indiscriminate with the use of pellet shotguns, tear gas and rubber bullets. There have been many reported cases of the tear gas entering residential areas and enclosed spaces. The use of these indiscriminate, less lethal weapons may be counter-productive if the aim is to disperse a crowd or de-escalate violence. According to the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, the deployment of non-lethal incapacitating weapons should be carefully evaluated in order to minimize the risk of endangering uninvolved persons, and the use of such weapons should be carefully controlled. For example, Fatah, a women from the village of Shanpora was hit by a tear-gas canister in her leg. Fatah recalled, “I was on road looking for my male family members when police raided the village. They were showering pellets and teargas canisters. One of the teargas canister hit my leg.”

Amnesty International India in its earlier briefing, ‘Losing Sight in Kashmir: The Impact of Pellet Firing Shotguns’ had found that the use of pellet guns for "crowd-control" has been responsible for blinding, killing and traumatizing people in Kashmir.

Curtailed access to medical services, doctors and critical supplies

'We are in a state of medical emergency"

Despite government claims that hospitals are well stocked with medical supplies and are continuing to provide emergency and procedural relief to patients, Amnesty International India found that the communications blackout had derailed health services in Kashmir. Adequate health care must be accessible and available to everyone. However, among those interviewed, it was commonly reported that ambulances and doctors were difficult to reach in time. Both doctors and medical staff report at least 50% drop in patients due to the following reasons:

1. No public transport to reach hospitals.
2. Critical medicines for advanced stages of many diseases not available with hospitals or stockists.
3. Without functional postal and courier services procurement of aid medicines from Delhi or neighbouring states also not possible.
4. No means of communication to secure appointments with doctors, know of their availability or inform any urgent need for ambulances.

With the restoration of post-paid mobile networks starting 14 October 2019 in Kashmir, communication has eased.

Dr Abdul Rashid Lone, a Senior Consultant & Oncologist and former Professor at Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), told Amnesty International India that the cancer patients who have to go for regular chemotherapy were not able to do so and were also finding it difficult to get their life-saving drugs. Most hospitals do not stock expensive drugs as the patients prefer to source them directly from companies or distributors as it is cheaper that way. Due to the continued communication blockade in Kashmir, and also unavailability of courier services, people had not been able to order these medicines any more. This had particularly affected those from remote areas as they were not able to reach the few stockists in Srinagar who might have some of the medicines.

In a most cogent case documented, one of Dr Lone's female patients was suffering from lung cancer. She was on a tablet that is being made by a particular company. The company charges around 6 lakhs for first 10 months and then provides it free of cost for lifetime. This particular patient was taking it from the last four years and doing well on the medication. However, since last one month the medicine had gone out of stock. When she finally did manage to get in touch with the company she was informed there were no available mediums for the delivery. If the patient is not able to secure her stock of medicine soon then her disease will flare up anytime now.

This is just one of the cases from many of survival on low medicine stocks, delayed chemotherapy sessions, or patients having to switch to alternative drugs in absence of their regular medication.

"It is going to affect their treatment… We are in a state of medical emergency," says Dr Lone.

Naseer Ahmed from Bemina in Srinagar had been bringing his sister to the NGO, Cancer Society of Kashmir, for assistance. His sister was diagnosed with stage three cancer just a few days before the blackout started in Kashmir on 5 August. She is registered at SKIMS and had to move to chemotherapies after all her diagnostics were done there, including biopsy, scans and mammography. Her first chemotherapy session fell on the day after the blackout was imposed. Although they were carrying all the documents but they were not allowed by the police to travel to the hospital. Denying or unreasonably delaying prompt and adequate medical care to a person who is ill or seriously injured is a clear violation of a person's right to health. They managed to reach the hospital by taking various by-lanes but on their way back they encountered a protest being stopped by the security forces. Naseer Ahmed recalls:

> "The doctors had advised us that if my sister is exposed to teargas smoke it may complicate her condition and can even result in the death of such patients. Her red blood cells were already low. To avoid such a risk, we discontinued with our regular doctor at SKIMS."

The hospital also did not have the prescribed mediation and therefore Naseer Ahmed reached out to the NGO for help.

A management staff from a private hospital in Srinagar (who does not wish to be named) told Amnesty International India that distant patients were not able to commute to hospitals due to unavailability of public transport. Even those who have their own cars were finding it difficult to reach hospitals due to restrictions imposed and road blockades. "The relationship between the doctors and patients have suffered the most. We have lost around 70% of our clients. The number of surgeries has gone down by almost 80%," says the hospital staff.

Patients from remote areas of Kashmir were worst affected. Before coming to hospitals patients would call up to ensure availability of doctors when they travels miles to the hospital. With no communication lines until 14 October they were not able to make contact. Many who took the chance in extreme circumstances, often found the particular doctor they sought to be not available. Many specialist doctors who used to have queues in front of their private clinics found themselves without any patients for the same reason – the unpredictability of access.

Even with partially restored communications, the situation has not returned to normalcy. Public transport continues to be unavailable mostly due to unpredictability of roadblocks and unrests.

In a few cases documented by Amnesty International India, regular patients who needed critical follow-ups have not been showing up. Hospital staff at Ahmad's Hospital in Srinagar share:

> "This is one of the oldest private hospitals in Srinagar. We have faced medical emergency earlier also during the 2014 floods. Ours was among the few hospitals that remained functional during that period. Even then getting lifesaving drugs and other medical stuff was not this difficult. We have to send our ambulances to pick our staff from their home and later drop them back. Only those living in nearby districts are able to come to our hospital. What is happening to others, only God knows…"

Finally, many hospital staff and doctors refused to speak to Amnesty International India on the nature and number of casualties that were being admitted to the hospitals. Conversations with medical staff were often interrupted by security personnel. While no official communication was in place, the atmosphere of fear and reprisal in Kashmir ensured silence from most staff and patients alike.

Local media paralysed

"In a way we can say that there is no journalism at all"

Amnesty International India during its research observed that the reality on the ground in Kashmir is very different from the narrative of 'normalcy' set forth by both the government and national news in India. One of the main reasons for this was the complete dependency on the government information in the absence of ground reports from local Kashmiri media. In several interviews with local journalists, editors and publishers conducted by Amnesty International India, it was repeatedly expressed that they felt threatened, intimidated or coerced into silence leading to the stark absence of voices from Kashmir. Zuhaib Maqbool Humza is a freelance photojournalist who has been covering the Kashmir conflict since the last six years. According to him, every journalist has been facing difficulties but most of them do not talk about it because they fear reprisal. He stated,

> "If we look back at the media coverage of the last mass unrest in Kashmir in 2016, the local newspapers brilliantly reported on the protests, the casualties, quoted hospital authorities and other administrative authorities. But since 5 August 2019, you haven't seen that anymore. Right now, local Kashmir newspapers' content is limited to how banana shake is helpful for your health."

The threat of reprisal was palpable as most journalists requested Amnesty International India to refrain from using their names or the publications they worked for. On the condition of anonymity, a woman journalist from Srinagar recounts the first Friday after the clampdown. She recalls,

> "I remember the day. There was no information on what was happening around. I left my home and reached the down town area of Srinagar. I starting taking general pictures of barbed wires and of the many standing security personnel there. A police officer arrived there and asked me to leave the spot. Pointing towards me he said, 'Close your camera or I will thrash you with your shoes'. These were his words."

She further recalls that her family were warned of inquiries about her from the local police station – creating a sense of fear of being identified and being detained. Many news reports[2] suggest that few journalists have been detained during their line of work in Kashmir adding to the paranoia and instilling fear in others.

Many journalists have reported similar incidents from various parts [3] of Kashmir where their cameras are checked and content of memory cards erased. According to Humza there are "no rules". Journalists are regularly asked for the sources of their information, asked to report on "development work", roughed up and detained. . The authorities also make home visits and make inquiries with their families.In another incident, journalists while returning from Soura, a locality known for some of the most intense protests in Kashmir since 5 August, found police waiting outside for them. "I felt as if I was carrying a deadly weapon instead of a camera," recalls Humza.

While many journalists have been provided curfew passes by the administration to carry out their work with ease, but these passes are rarely respected on the ground. In Munawarbad, while refusing to accept the District Magistrate's curfew pass, a policeman said, "I am the District Magistrate here." In another incident a journalist spent close to an

[2] https://cpj.org/blog/2019/09/kashmirs-news-media-faces-existential-crisis-amid-.php

[3] Soura, Shaheedgunj, Nowhatta, etc

hour convincing a CRPF personnel in Nawa Kadal that the curfew pass is from the district magistrate and there is no other "authorisation letter".

Humza also said, "It has never been easy to shoot conflict. I was shot with a pellet gun from 15-20 feet while covering a protest. After three years of recuperation I have comeback, but nothing has changed. We use vest and helmets with the word "PRESS" clearly written on them, but we are still threatened." Previously, while covering protests the journalists used to stand on the side of the police as it was supposed to be safer but not anymore as the journalists themselves are roughed up.

In the beginning of September, the Kashmir Press club had revealed that at least three senior journalists were asked to vacate their government-sponsored accommodation. This was one of many harassment techniques used for coercing journalists to toe a particular line. Early October, the Press club again stated:

> "The restrictions are totally unwarranted and unreasonable aimed at gagging the Kashmir press. Misgiving that the government doesn't intend to provide an enabling atmosphere for the media to operate in the valley"

While on one hand, the local journalists are finding it difficult to report from the ground, on the other publishers and editors who were struggling to circumvent the communications lockdown, have had some ease in bringing out meaningful news content in the last week. Amnesty International India in its research found that the curtailing of communication services had paralyzed newspapers in Kashmir in the following ways:

1. No access to internet and mobile services affected news information collection, coordination, verification and dissemination
2. Most newspaper websites have not been updated since 5 August and have lost their online readership
3. Newspapers were only reproducing government information or wire agency reports collected from the media facilitation centre set up by the government in Srinagar
4. Newspapers were reduced to 4 printed pages from the usual 16-20 pages
5. Circulation of newspapers has dwindled and distribution mechanism has collapsed as no public transport is available

A senior newspaper publisher and member of Kashmir Editors Guild, speaking with Amnesty International India on the condition of anonymity, said that withholding of advertisements, especially from the government who was the largest advertiser in Kashmir, has led to a huge loss of revenue. Most newspapers were only printing the requisite numbers needed to maintain their active newspaper registrations and will not be able to afford to sustain if the situation does not change soon.

He further states,

> "What is the job of newspapers? To take the information to readers. But we didn't have information ourselves. In our first editorial after 5 August blackout, I addressed my readers and told them that we, as newspaper, know nothing. We were publishing just to tell people that we are there… "

While broadband services have been restored in Jammu, mobile internet services still remain suspended in the state. Online access has become indispensable and is inseparable for freedom of press in today's age. The state's information department has established a media facilitation centre in Srinagar, which has a few computers with

internet access. For many journalists this continues their sole connection with the online world. A common concern expressed by many journalists who spoke with Amnesty International India were the long waits for their turn at the centre and the constant threat of being under surveillance there. “May be our emails are compromised, so may be the phone calls we make from there,” shared a journalist.

Amnesty International India believes that the intimidation and coercive attacks from security forces faced by journalists in Kashmir severely affects their independence in reporting and verifying the events unfolding in Kashmir since 5 August 2019. Freedom of press is crucial for holding institutions accountable and the present situation raises grave concerns of human rights violations that may occur yet remain unreported due to Government of India's near-total control over information coming out of Kashmir. Most importantly, this clampdown is effectively silencing the truth.

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